

صُحْبَة



Suḥbah and the Oral Tradition

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by

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وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ

WA LA-DḥIKRU-LLĀHI AKBAR

and the remembrance of Allāh is the greatest!
(Sūrah al-Aʿnabūt 29:45)



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ

yāā °ayyuha-l-ladhīna °āmanu-t-taqu-llāha

wa kunū ma°a-ṣ-ṣādiqīn

O you who believe, preserve your selves for Allāh
and keep company with those who are true [to their word].

(Surah at-Tawba 9:119)

The Word of Allāh ﷻ is for all time, for every era and for every century. It is an ongoing order, from which we understand the importance of keeping company with the trustworthy. Allāh ﷻ orders all human beings to accompany them, because by keeping their company, one will see how they live their lives, how they deal with people, how they address their companions, how they eat, how they sleep, and how they worship. By accompanying them, one will learn all their good manners and their ways of life.

Another way to understand this verse is that one should accompany a trustworthy person, because being trustworthy is very rare and not many people achieve it. Everyone, however, can try to find a trustworthy person and accompany him, in order to be guided. Following a trustworthy person is essential to our spiritual path. Such a person is needed to lead us and to guide us on our way.

The living presence of a connected ṣhaykh is essential. Through his physical and spiritual linkage to the Prophet ﷺ, he establishes the murīd's connection as well. The murīd's obligation is to maintain his connection to his ṣhaykh, to hold tightly to the hand of the one within his reach. The ṣhaykh maintains the further links to the previous ṣhaykhs and to the Prophet ﷺ.

The importance of accompanying a true master is clear. It provides the seeker with the opportunity to learn the essentials of ethics and good conduct, to discover the hidden defects of his heart, and to be lifted to higher states of being. There are two requisites in this way: when the seeker feels the need to seek, he must first purify his intention and then ask Allāh ﷻ to connect him to a truthful person and seek that one.

Some Notes and Examples of the Oral Tradition in ʿIslām

ʿIslām is a religion based on oral tradition. Much of what we know of ʿIslām in the present is based on orally transmitted information. All authority in the religion can in the end be traced back to oral transmission.

The Qurʾān is the central text of ʿIslām, the literal words of Allāh ﷻ recited to Muḥammad ﷺ. This is the first oral authority in ʿIslām. The Qurʾān was spoken by the Prophet ﷺ, repeated by his companions ﷺ, memorized, written down on different materials and passed on to others both orally and in writing. After the Prophet ﷺ died all the written fragments were gathered together beginning in the time of Abu Bakr ﷺ and continuing to the time of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān ﷺ, who finally ordered five copies to be made and distributed to five centers across the Muslim world. This is the received Qurʾān and is accepted by all Muslims. Although there are some very minor controversies between Sunnis and Shiʿah, neither school denies the authority of the Qurʾān assembled by ʿUthmān ﷺ and the same exact version is used by both Sunni and Shiʿah.

Unfortunately, although the Qurʾān states what we should do in order to be on the right path, it does not always tell us how. This is where oral history becomes decisive. Most of what is in and how we practice our religion was originally transmitted orally or was demonstrated by the acts and actions of the Prophet ﷺ. During his ﷺ lifetime, these sayings (*ḥadīth*/الحديث) were for the most part not written down but were orally transmitted. The Sunni canon of ḥadīth took its final form more than 230 years after the death of Muhammad (632c.e.). Later scholars may have debated, and do still debate, the authenticity of particular ḥadīth but the authority of the canon as a whole is generally not questioned.

This canon, called the six ṣaḥīḥ (صحيح) major ḥadīth collections, includes: Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukḥarī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Sunan Abu Dawood, al-Sunan al-Sughra, Sunan al-Tirmidhi and Sunan ibn Majah.

Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukḥarī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim are considered the most reliable of these collections in addition to *al-Muwatṭʾa* (الموطأ) of Anās bin Mālik, a scholar and well-known ṣaḥabī of the Prophet ﷺ.

This work by the Sunnis, al-Bukḥarī, Muslim, an-Nasaʿi al-Suḥra, ʿAbu Daʿūd, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Maja took place mainly during the reign of ʿUmar ibn AbdulʿAziz during the 8th and 9th centuries C.E. Additionally the Shīʿah (شيعة) have their own primary ḥadīth collections compiled by three of their scholars which are: *Kitāb al-Kaḥfī* by Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb al-Kulayni ar-Rāzi (329/940ce AH), *Man lā yahduruhu-l-Faqīḥ* by Muḥammad ibn Babuya and *at-Tahdhīb* and *al-ʿIstibṣar* both by Shaykh Muḥammad Tusi. These two different canonical collections are referred to in all matters of Islamic jurisprudence to this day by both Sunnis and Shīʿah though necessarily in different ways by the two different schools.

It is the same in the present. If we want to know something we in the end must ‘hear’ it from someone. It can be argued that a book is just an encapsulated form of speech. Which it is. But everything in the beginning and in the end depends on the oral transmission in whatever original form it takes. This is why we sit with our ṣhuyūkh so we can “hear” what they say and “see” what they do.



The inner aspect of the spirituality of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions رضي الله عنهم influenced the people who met them. The effect of the inner aspect of spirituality also affects the physical. When one has been trying to emulate goodness and virtuous deeds and thoughts — the contemplation of doing something wrong causes one to feel depressed and in the same way one feels lighter when one has achieved some good deed or satisfying worship. So the spiritual aspect has a great bearing on one’s physical self too, yet the effect on the physical is not as important as the effect on the inner self.

Someone inquired what the essentials for achieving the inner improvement were. One must acquire knowledge, act upon it and turn to Allāh ﷻ with one’s heart, in all sincerity.

Whether this is done individually or collectively, it will result in the reflection of its good influence. Keeping good company (ṣuḥbah/صحبة) is most important.

The merits of performance of good deeds and keeping good company have been proven time and again. A child learns language and manners and deeds from his home and his parents. If a child is left in the jungle and grows up with animals, he may remain protected but will behave like the animals around him. The finer manners of humans will be totally absent.

Allāh ﷻ recited (*qiraʿ*) Qurʾān to Jibrīl ﷺ who recited the Qurʾān to the Prophet ﷺ and the Prophet ﷺ in turn recited it to others and they in turn recited it to others.

In times past, when a child was old enough to be educated he was sent to stay with a person known for his virtue, scholarship, knowledge, integrity and principles. The student went to live with his tutor and absorb refinement of character and manners. So also all those who were in the company of the Prophet ﷺ and learnt at his feet and from his blessed lips were highly respected and people went to them from far and wide to learn from them.

After the Companions ﷺ of the Prophet ﷺ, the Followers ﷺ also received the same reverence and importance. As they had studied with the Companions ﷺ of the Prophet ﷺ, they were all examples to follow.

And so it continues from then until now in an uninterrupted unbroken chain.

The inner aspect of their spirituality and goodness becomes reflected in the student; they are stamped so to say with the attributes and qualities of the model.

Each student comes and is presented to their teacher like a fresh unwritten page or an empty container and each one will absorb according to his or her innate capacity. The container must be clean and empty of traces of ego. If it is not, then the person cannot receive correctly but only in an adulterated form. The inner ability to accept must be present, be it general knowledge, spiritual, moral or social truths or ways, for if there is no inner ability to accept then you will have for a student one who is closed and rejecting the truth and teachings, thus making true learning impossible.

When you come across a person who has knowledge of religion and practices it well, and has excellence of nature and good habits and you see he is living life as a true Muslim, stay in his company or send your children to be in such company. This has been the traditional practice, from following the practices (*sunnah*) of the Prophet ﷺ, his excellent companions and their followers and then the followers of the scholarly ʿImāms such as ʿImām Ja'far b. Muhammad aṣ-Ṣādiq, ʿImām ʿAbu Hanifa, ʿImām Mālik ibn Anas, Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shāfiʿi, ʿImām Aḥmad bin Hanbal and others, though not quite of the same stature of those whom I have just mentioned, throughout the ages and generations.

One wishes to follow their ways, as one loves the Prophet ﷺ and those close to him. One wishes to walk on the path of one's favorite and beloved teachers. Listening to the discourses and association with the ṣhuyukḥ (صحبة) is derived from ṣaḥābah (صحابه) or companionship, association or comradeship, and has been one of the principles of learning from the beginning of time.



The question arises whether is it necessary to give the oath of allegiance (*bayʿah* بَيْعَة) in order to fully benefit from the ṣuḥbah of the ṣhuyukḥ.

Bayʿah or “taking hand” is sanctioned by the Qurʾānic ʾayāt below. It is the initiation ritual specific to many Sufi Orders and was established by the Prophet ﷺ when he allowed his trusted companions to take his hand and commit themselves to vastly increase their love and loyalty to Allāh ﷻ and to give him ﷺ their absolute loyalty: this is directly referred to in the Qurʾān.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُبَايِعُونَكَ إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ

ʾinna-l-ladhīna yubāyiʿūnaka ʾinnamā yubāyiʿūna-llaha
yadu-llāhi fowqa ʾaydīhim

those who swear allegiance to you swear allegiance to Allāh:
[and] the Hand Of Allāh is over their hands.

(Sūrah al-Faṭḥ 48:10)

The answer is to the question is, not necessarily, but it has its advantages/benefits. When one has an intention to do something, it is better to make it clear and concrete. Just as when one enters into any transaction or agreement, Allāh ﷻ tells us in Sūratu-l-Baqarah to write it down. Similarly the Prophet ﷺ made people promise they would pray (*ṣalat, namaz*), pay the poor tax (*zakāt*), fast (*ṣawm*), struggle in the Way of Allāh (*jihād*), and not run away or avoid necessary battle — all these were agreements. Just as in the contemporary world one shakes hands after completing an agreement, so in bay'at the promise or agreement for tutorship and training in faith and in religion becomes the responsibility of the teacher and is sealed by a handshake. This brings the spiritual blessing of the saints of the lineage, whether they are living in this world or not.

In fact, the connection goes all the way to the Prophet ﷺ who took the bay'at from the men, who promised to follow his training, and from the women, whom he asked that they would do whatever was required to be morally correct and religious. So taking bay'at is giving a formal declaration of acceptance of the pupil and teacher relationship and responsibility in place of a vague intention in the heart. This is also following in the footsteps of the way of the Prophet ﷺ.

People visit (*ziyārah/زيارة*) the tomb (*maqām*) of the Prophet ﷺ. They do not go there just to see a monument. They go to have a spiritual meeting with him ﷺ. Allāh ﷻ says the Prophets are not dead; they are living. When one goes to visit and do ziyārah of the Prophet ﷺ one receives a spiritual radiance from the one who is occupying the maqām.

وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتٌ ۚ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ

wa lā taqūlū li-mañ-yuqtalu fī sabīli-llāhi ʿamwāt;
bal ʿaḥyāuñw-wa lakin lā tashʿurūn

Do not say that those who are slain in in the way of Allāh are dead
they are living but you do not know how.

(Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:154)

In the same way, the ʿawliyāʾ ﷺ too are living, and when you make your bayʿat you are receiving radiance and light from the ʿawliyāʾ of the lineage. Time or distance is no barrier for this. You benefit from their effulgence. Not only do you receive as much as your capacity, but being and in sharing their company/suḥbah causes an increase in your capacity to receive. There are certain prerequisites:



1. Sound purpose, which is your desire for your keeping company with the ṣhaykh based on the realisation of your own slaveness and the fulfilment of the rights of Lordship, with out any miracles, or arrival at stations or degrees, or desires of the self.

2. Clear sincerity, which here means to believe in the secret of election in the one whose company he keeps. It is the basis of the path. The one without sincerity does not arrive, even if he stays with the ṣhaykh a thousand years.

Sincerity is the knowledge of the secret. Each knows of the secret of the ṣhaykh according to his sincerity (ʿikhlāṣ). It is the prize for which the murīd spends his spirit and heart and secret. He who does not sincerely trust his ṣhaykh has nothing to spend on his secret. We have an indication from ʿAṣḥarqī ﷺ :

“The one who does not trust has nothing to spend.

The one who does not realize brings no sign.”

3. Courtesy is the key to the door. He who does not have it does not enter. The one who has bad manners with the beloveds of Allāh (ʿawliyāʾ) will be turned away from the door and into the wilderness realm of animals.

One of the ʿawliyāʾ karam ﷺ used to order the people who wanted to enter and keep company to go and keep company with the civil authorities until they had gained manners. The one who has no courtesy with the ṣhaykh and the fuqarā gains nothing but deprivation from their company.

4. Pure states must be in accord with the ṣhārīʿah so that the murīd does not harm any one of the People. The murīd who does not have states (aḥwāl) does not reach the Stations (maqamāt) of the Men.

Travel to the Presence of the Perfectly Pure does not occur except by going against and waging war (*jihād*) on the self.

It says in the Ḥikam, “Were it not for the battlefield of the selves, meaning war on them, the travel of the traveller would not be realised.”

In this instance, ‘states’ means breaking the habits of the self and the destruction of their outward manifestations. The faqīr must practice what will diminish the self and obliterate its might. These practices must be permissible. These are the pure and pleasing states. States that are contrary to the ṣhārī°ah, and these are the states of unawareness and blindness, only increase the one who has them in his or her lack of awareness and general blindness.

In the same way that it is not proper to bury seeds in barren or infertile land, it is also not permissible to bury the self in obscurity in a displeasing manner. Pure states are those in which there is no harm for anyone and which are not contrary to the order of ṣhārī°ah.

5. Protection of honor means protection of the honor of the ṣhaykh, present or absent. Alive or dead. The murīd must not sit in a place where his ṣhaykh is mentioned with harm or is being diminished. He must also protect the honor of the brothers. He must take responsibility, and be patient if they avoid him. He must exalt the old among them and be compassionate with the young.

He who is broken by the ṣhaykh is not put together by the brothers. The one who is broken by the brothers may be put together by the ṣhaykh.

The murīd must protect and trust in the honor of all the Muslims, especially the scholars and people of right actions.

It is said that the pillars of ṣufism are gathered in four things:

- a) To stop harm.
- b) To put up with being left.
- c) To witness purity.
- d) To put this world behind one's back.

6. Excellence of service is not sound except by service to the ṣaykh and to the brothers. Amongst the ḥadīth we find this, “The master of the people is the one who serves them.”

Excellence of service is also made sound by the service of The Truth (*al-ḥaqq*), and that is one of the great goals of the Way.

Once the ṣaykh is satisfied that the murīd has grasped the outward knowledge, and has seen preparedness in him outwardly, the ṣaykh will show the murīd what had been ambiguous until then of the attributes of the self.

The ṣaykh orders the murīd to outward actions like prayer, fasting, isolation, silence and invocation with the tongue, until he sees that the murīd has perfected the outward knowledge and tasted his secret and sweetness. This means that the murīd has tasted the sweetness of prayer and fasting and the sweetness of isolation and silence, until isolation becomes sweeter to him than mixing with people, and silence becomes sweeter than speech to him, and invocation of Allāh ﷻ is mixed with him to the point that he cannot stop it even if he or she wants. This is the sign of the perfection of the outward wisdom.

Then the murid is ready for the inward knowledge.

At that time the ṣaykh shows him the attributes of his self which were hidden from him — like love of reputation, or leadership, or love of wealth, or anger, or impatience, and so on of the attributes of the self which we cannot number. One of the sufis said, “The self has imperfections to the degree and in the amount of the perfections of Allāh ﷻ.”

As-Salmi رحمه الله said, “The behavior of the self is pride, vanity, boasting, emptiness, hatred, treachery, rancour, greed, false hope, holding a grudge, jealousy, irritation, worry, restlessness, expectation, accumulation, withholding, cowardice, ignorance, laziness, aversions, antipathy, following desires, mockery, demanding, conceit, impetuosity, love of comfort, heedlessness, quarrelsomeness, domination, tyranny, enmity, discord, opposition, contradiction, fighting, rivalry, slander, false accusations, lies, backbiting,

foolishness, calling obscenities, bad opinion, blame, insolence, betrayal, swindling, maliciousness, and debauchery.”

It is obligatory on the murīd to know these things so that he or she can avoid them and struggle to eliminate them and to exchange them for what is best. The one who does not know them will stray. The murīd must exchange pride for humility and harshness for affection and lies for sincerity, and success is with Allāh ﷻ.



Shaykh Aḥmad az-Zarrūq ﷺ said,

The roots of blameworthy behavior are three:

1. To be pleased with the self.
2. To fear creation.
3. To be concerned about provision.

From the first comes desire, forgetfulness and disobedience.

From the second comes anger, rancour and jealousy.

From the third comes greed and expectation and avarice.'

He also said, “To hold onto one thing will eliminate all of these, and that is not to be pleased with the self in any state, and to beware of it at all times.”

We find in the *Ḥikam* of Shaykh ʿIbn Aṭāʾillah as-Sakandarī ﷺ, “The root of every disobedience and desire and forgetfulness is contentment with the self, and the root of every obedience and wakefulness and abstention is your not being content with your self.”

The worst thing is to keep company with a scholar who is content with himself. It is better for you to keep company with someone who is ignorant but is not content with himself. What knowledge does a scholar have who is content with himself? What ignorance does a man have who is ignorant but not content with himself?

When the author of the *Ḥikam* says ‘once he has grasped the outward knowledge’ he means that the murīd perfects the deeds of the outward knowledge, and this is the result of keeping company with the shaykh, as we have seen before.

And Allāh the Exalted knows best.

Then he mentions how the self dies, and he says:

“They force it to drink the glass of death, and it screams, ‘How can you kill me?’”

This means that if the ṣhaykh wants to move the murīd to inward action, he orders him to eliminate the self. That is the cause of the life of the spirit, as Ibn al-Farīd ؒ puts it, “In death there is my life”. The ṣhuyukh make the murīd drink the glass of death, against the will of the self.

That is done by breaking its habits and stopping it from its desires. The greatest habits are might and reputation.

The nafs do not move to humility and obscurity and humbleness except after a great struggle and suffering a fierce death. If humility and might and obscurity and appearance are the same to it, then it is dead.

Muḥammad ibn Kḥalīf ؒ said, “A man is not perfected until his heart is in balance with regard to four matters: withholding and giving, might and humility.”

Ṣhaykh Abu Madyan ؒ said, “The one who does not die does not see the truth.”

Ṣhaykh Abu'l ʿAbbās al-Mursī ؒ said, “There is no entering upon Allāh ؒ except by two doors: by the great annihilation, which is natural death, or by the lesser annihilation, with which this group is concerned.”

It is written, “One does not enter upon Allāh ؒ until one has died four deaths:

1. The red death, which is to oppose the self.
2. The black death, which is to endure trials and harm from creation.
3. The white death, which is hunger.
4. The green death, which is to wear the patched robe.”

Ṣhaykh ʿAḥmad az-Zarrūq ؒ said, “The death of the self does not occur except by three means:

1.) To isolate it from its willing, so that it neither moves nor remains still except by the realization of intention that is in accord with knowledge without desire.

2.) To turn away from everything that it appreciates in the world of bodies and natures, knowledges and deeds, meanness and covetousness, realities, and basics.

3.) The third is to leave whatever is left to which it still inclines.”

This is why Ṣhaykh Abu'l ʿAbbās al-Mursī ؒ said, “The wali does not arrive at Allāh ؒ until the desire for arrival is cut off from his self.”

This means with courtesy and submission, not from boredom, as Ṣhaykh ʿIbn ʿAṭāʾillāh as-Sakandarī ؒ mentioned.

For this reason Ṣhaykh ʿAbdu-Salām ʿibn al-Maṣḥish ؒ said in his supplication, “Oh Allāh ؒ, I seek refuge in You from the coolness of pleasure and submission, like others seek refuge in You from the heat of disobedience and management.”

Ṣhaykh al-Wasitī ؒ said, “To find obedience sweet is a deadly poison.” The phrase “and the nafs scream, ‘How can you kill me?’” is the tongue of the state of the self, which is near to the tongue of its actual speech.

Man hears it from the inward of the self as if it were sensory speech. The self would choose sensory death by preference and it stays that way until it is tamed and disciplined. This is the sign of its death, and Allāh the Exalted knows best.



When someone enters the company of his ṣhaykh, his heart is kindled with the Love of Allāh ؒ. However, when he leaves that blessed company, the flame of love is threatened by the ceaseless blowing and gusting winds of the environment around him. If, affected by these winds, a person were to commit a sin, the love of Allāh ؒ would be extinguished. It is therefore necessary to safeguard yourself from sins.

Another necessity for keeping the flame of love kindled is fuel, which in this case is the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ prescribed by one's ṣaykh in the form of various *mu'amalāt* (works or duties). Thus, punctuality in attending the company of one's ṣaykh, abstinence from sins and completing one's assigned duties, are necessary steps towards securing the Love of Allāh ﷻ.



Take a mirror that has been lying around and is covered in dust and put it out in the sunshine next to a clean polished mirror. The sunlight will strike them both equally, and both will shine, yet the polished mirror will be dazzlingly bright. It will give a true reflection of the sun, whereas the other will give off a dull shine.

The friends of Allāh ﷻ make such efforts on their hearts that they become pure and clean.

When they are pure they receive spiritual knowledge (*ma'arifah* / المعرفة) of Allāh ﷻ. The hearts of sinners are dulled by sins and so cannot acquire the recognition of Allāh ﷻ.



“When a murīd connects himself to a ṣaykh but his intentions are insincere, then although the ṣaykh's heart emanates spirituality, it will not enter his heart.”

The situation is similar to someone wishing to collect rainwater, who places an overturned bucket outside during a heavy downpour.

Just as the torrent of rain will never ever fill an overturned vessel, the spirituality of the ṣaykh will never fill an insincere person's heart.

Having corrupt intentions means the vessel of the heart is overturned and unable to receive any benefit from the ṣaykh.



Hajj ʿImdadullāh Makkī رحمه الله used to say that the Mercy and Love of Allāh ﷻ descends on that person who gains a place of love in the heart of the ṣaykh.

The reason is that the Mercy and Love of Allāh ﷻ continuously descends on the heart of the ṣhaykh, so when someone else's love permeates the heart of the ṣhaykh then he too becomes the recipient of the Mercy and Love of Allāh ﷻ.”



A Great Bounty — Love for the sake of Allāh ﷻ

It is an unfortunate state of affairs that many in the present time establish connections with the ṣhuyukh and spiritually pious elders solely for worldly benefit.

They acquire worldly benefit through their wisdom and experience, yet remain unconcerned about attaining anything of their spirituality. A murīd can and should ask his ṣhaykh for guidance on worldly matters, as worldly matters often relate to dīn, but the predominant factor in his connection with his ṣhaykh should be dīn.

Mawlana Ashraf ʿAlī Ṭhanwī states that the murīd who takes guidance from his ṣhaykh on worldly matters only is like a person who visits a goldsmith to get his shoes mended.

Since the path of spiritual struggle is a rugged one with numerous side paths, it is very difficult for the spiritual wayfarer to enter it alone. It is of practical significance for him to accompany a completed spiritual guide who knows the defects of the soul and knows the path of spiritual struggle and treatment.

By keeping the company of a spiritual guide, the spiritual aspirant gains practical experience in the ways of purifying his soul, just as he obtains the sacred spiritual effulgence of the ṣhaykh who pushes him to perfect his own self and personality, raising him above the defects and evil traits. The Messenger ﷺ was the spiritual guide of the highest rank and the greatest purifier who trained his noble Companions رضى الله عنهم and purified their souls through his statements and spiritual state – as Allāh ﷻ described him: *“He it is Who has raised up among the unlettered ones a Messenger from among their selves to recite to them His Signs and to purify them and teach them The Book and The Wisdom though before they were clearly astray.”*

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ
آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ
وَأِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ

huwa-l-ladhī ba‘aṯha fi-l-‘ummiyyina rasūlam-minhum yatlū ‘alayhim
‘āyātihi wa yuzakkīhim wa yu‘allimuhumu-l-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmata
wa iñ kānū miñ qabālu lafī ḍalālīm-mubīn
(Sūratu-l-Jumu‘ah 68:2)

When the spiritual aspirant keeps close company with his guide and surrenders to him just as the patient surrenders himself to the physician, he shall find uprightness and benefit. When ṣhayṭān injects the heart of the aspirant with the delusional idea that he is independent, and he becomes conceited and feels that he does not need to associate with his ṣhaykh, he will fail utterly and be debarred from the path, whereas he thinks that he is still on his journey, and he will be cut off, whereas he thinks that he is arriving.

Ṣhaykh ‘Isma‘īl al-Ḥaqqī ؒ said in his Qu‘ānic exegesis:

“Many in the intermediate part of this path (meaning the ṣufīs) are afflicted with numerous pitfalls in their spiritual wayfaring. These pitfalls present themselves when their souls become bored with the spiritual struggles and get tired of spiritual rigor. Ṣhayṭān comes to them and whispers to them and their lower selves, fooling them into thinking that in their spiritual wayfaring, they have reached such a level that they are no longer in need of keeping the company of a ṣhaykh or submitting their affairs to him. As a consequence, they leave the company of the ṣhaykh and begin the pursuit of their own ends in accordance with their egos, falling into the trap of failure and end up becoming the laughing stock of ṣhayṭān.”

The ṣhaykh has visited the well of life and brought back the water for the thirsty to drink. Some complain about the cup, some say it is the wrong time of day to drink. Some say they don’t like the cup-bearer. Some say the water is too cold or not cold enough.

The point, of course, is who cares about any of that as long as one gets the water to drink. If you are thirsty, you want water. First, though, you must realize what thirst is and then discover that you are thirsty. Then find the water carrier. Being able to recognize a true teacher or ṣhaykh requires in itself a certain spiritual development. You must have developed enough humility and truth about yourself to ask for help. Asking for help means to leave your 'independence' behind.

There is in truth no independence. We depend on each other in so many ways. When we can recognize our own strengths and weaknesses, when we have taken honest stock of ourselves, most of us would agree that we need help. We need help because we all have habits. Bad habits. And we all need help going through them and picking out the ones we don't need. To do that we need help — plus.

If you don't think you need help, then, without doubt, you need professional help even more. This is a job you cannot do by yourself. Remember, though, that knowing you need help is not the product but the only a part of the process. The goal is to be at peace with Allāh ﷻ, to walk always with Allāh ﷻ, to know Allāh ﷻ, and to be grateful to Allāh ﷻ. A ṣhaykh may be able to help. Indeed the ṣhaykh is your best friend and your nafs' worst enemy.

Never let the doubt in. Doubt is the biggest weapon of ṣhayṭān through which he is able to create distance between Allāh ﷻ and you and you and the ṣhaykh. This is the foremost sickness of the heart. It is necessary for the human being to purify his heart of any doubts concerning Allāh ﷻ, the Prophet ﷺ and the Hereafter and His friends (ʿawliyā) ﷺ. This grave sickness afflicts some people, particularly at the point of death — leading them to an ugly end.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Leave that which makes you doubt for that which does not make you doubt."



A Story

Mawlanā was young at that time. There was a rich man who wanted to go for ḥajj. First they went by camel until they reached the sea and then they took a ship and sailed to Jeddah, then travelled by donkey from Jeddah to Makkah. The rich man was accompanying another person who, unknown to him, was a walī. The rich man told the walī, “You will be my companion. I will spend everything on you, you must accompany me.” That walī had reached the maqām *al-faradanī* (being oneself by oneself), one of the stations. Now when you accompany a walī, don’t think it is going to be easy. It is better not to accompany a walī because your going and return definitely won’t be easy. He wants to be sure your ḥajj is accepted.

That is why he said there are three things you have to ask your shaykh. One is when you want to travel for ḥajj, you have to ask your shaykh to see if he gives permission or not. Because not every time does Allāh ﷻ send His Mercy or His Manifestations (*tajalliat*) on the people at °Arafat. Because when you stand (*waqafa*) on °Arafah that is Ḥajj; even you don’t complete the rest of it you will be called ḥajji. So the shaykh looks in *lawḥim-mahfūdh* to see if this is the year that Allāh ﷻ is going to send the manifestation of his Beautiful Names and Attributes. If not he tells you “don’t go”. He tells you go next year. But if you never went, then you must go. Because it is an obligation.

Also when you want to marry, you might be in love with someone but you must ask the shaykh, as she or he might not be the one written for you.

And when you want to move from one place to another you must ask the shaykh. You cannot go without asking, in these three cases: Ḥajj, Marriage and Moving.

So the rich man went to the walī and said, “I want you to accompany me on ḥajj.” And the walī said, “I will”, and off they went.

On the way they took a boat. Now when you carry your passport and your money, what do you do with it? You hide it — you don’t want to lose it and you don’t want to be robbed.

Everyone is holding onto their money. The walī asked the rich man “Where are you putting your money?” He said, “I am putting it on my chest and I am tying it under my clothes. I don’t want it to be lost.” The walī said, “Give it to me – I will take care of it.” But the rich man didn’t want to give his money to the walī.

Sometimes we make mistakes. If a walī asks you something don’t ever say “no”!

Allāh ﷻ might save you from many difficulties you don’t know about.

So the walī said, “Give your money to me; I will keep it for you.” The rich man said, “No! Don’t worry I’m putting it in a safe place.”

The walī said, “As you like.” On the boat they took for ḥajj someone had a monkey. He was bringing the monkey to Jeddah maybe to do tricks in the street, maybe to beg. Allāh ﷻ knows. As it was that monkey came out of nowhere and humped on the rich man and reached under his shirt and took his money and went all the way up the mast of the boat where no one could reach him. Then he opened the purse in which was 1000 golden coins. One golden coin he threw to the man, and one golden coin he threw into the sea. One to the man, one to the sea. That man began crying that his money is gone. One to him, one to the sea. One to him, one to the sea until it was finished. 500 the sea took and 500 the man took.

That man was so angry. The walī said, “Why are you angry?” He said, “Didn’t you see what happened?” He said, “Ok, that is good what happened. But look, nothing will happen without it being the will of Allāh ﷻ. And don’t talk too much or else I will leave you.” Then that man is worried as now he knows this is really a walī.

As they are speaking like that, the man is still angry but the walī is reciting some ʿawrād and the rich man’s wife is listening to the wali reciting and the rich man asks, “What are you listening to?” But at the same time he is still arguing with the walī. Then she — just at the time the rich man was arguing with the walī — was making ablution (*al-wuḍūʾ*/الوضوء) and she slipped and fell into the sea. As I said if you want to accompany the walī there will be difficulty.

That is why they say, “If you want to be near the walī you should know it is like being near fire.”

So what happened?

The lady disappeared. They stopped the boat and they looked, but they didn’t find her. And now the rich man was crying.

First he lost half his money and then he lost his wife. He was shouting, “What kind of walī are you? What kind of walī are you? Why did I ask you to accompany me?”

So what happened?

That rich man had covered over the truth (*kafara* كفر) not in the sense that he denied Allāh ﷻ but in the sense that he got couldn’t ‘see’, didn’t recognise the walī. In truth he was fed up with the walī for having lost him both his money and his wife.

The walī didn’t say anything and the boat sailed on. They reached the port. And the people are coming out on deck.

“Look!” said the walī.

And the man saw his wife. By the boat, on the dock.

He was so happy that he saw his wife. And he looked at her and he said, “I am so happy to see you. How you... you fell off the ship into the sea. What happened?” She said, “Ask the ṣhaykh. Ask the walī.” Now he understood that had he made a big mistake.

Why did she tell him “ask the ṣhaykh”?

Because she saw and heard something coming from that walī. “Ask the walī, ask the ṣhaykh!” He came to him and said, “Ya sayyidee!” Now he is saying “Ya sayyidee!” Before he was denying.

But then he said, “I am still angry because I lost my money, but I am happy to see my wife.” In other words he understood nothing and was still denying everything. He couldn’t see in the beginning nor could he see at the end but he did love his wife even if he lost his money. This is a story that not everyone understands.



Sharḥ on the Song of ʿAbu Madyan al-Gawth رحمته الله
by Shaykh Abdalqadir as-Sufi

“The pleasure of life is only in the company of the fuqarā. They are the sultans, the masters, the princes.”

There is no higher company. As they are the least of men and make no claims, they are the elite and the two worlds are their property. With them is the Maqam al-Maḥmud, for the Messenger ﷺ said, “Look for me among the poor, for I was only sent to you because of them,” and “Poverty is all my glory,” and “Allāh loves the poor.”

“Therefore keep their company and have adab in their assemblies. Leave your portion behind you whenever they send you forward.”

Keep their company — in this is half the science of knowledge. Our knowledge is not informational, it is transmitted.

The company of the fuqarā is like a developing fluid in which the murīd is soaked, until by its properties, the self emerges and is recognised.

“Watch the shaykh carefully in his states, perhaps a trace of his approval will be seen on you.”

The shaykh has three states in public.

1) Meeting. Like a host with his guests or a father with his children. Here all is hidden under the light of welcome, attention, news, and the exchange of courtesies. This is the most difficult ground for the new murīd. Levity is for the nursery and where there is play there is no work.

2) Guidance. When the shaykh speaks to one person, take it as meant for you. The shaykh conceals his serious admonition and hides his target both in reproach and in love. When the shaykh speaks to you consider it is a cross-roads — do not turn back on your path. If he is pleased with you, resolve to strengthen your purpose. If he is displeased, delight in his noticing it. When he speaks of Allāh ﷻ — take it in — all his words will become realities for you.

3) Absence. When the ṣhaykh withdraws from the company inwardly during sama^ʿa or in a meeting, go with him. It was for this that you set out. It was for this that you set out.

This draws you into the audience chamber of the heart.

“Perhaps a trace of his approval will be seen on you.”

This is a light from Allāh ﷻ and without intermediary. The ṣhaykh does not ‘do’ anything. He recognises those Allāh ﷻ loves. This recognition has wisdom in it for him and for you. Ṣhaykh ʿAḥmad al-Badawi of Fez ﷺ said, “One glance from the ṣhaykh wipes out a thousand wrong actions.”

This is very difficult for the people of thought-forms to understand but it easy for the people of states.

This concerns the inner zone of the *lubb*, or core of the human self’s awareness. Its *mithāl* (example or metaphor) is the rays of the sun. If you sit in the sun you become sunburned. If you sit with the ṣhaykh you become purified, later intoxicated, and finally annihilated. As the one who is first warmed, then burned, and at the end finally blinded by the rays of the sun. In this zone is the innermost reality and the secrets of ‘keeping company.’

“Advance with seriousness and leap to serve him. Perhaps he will be pleased, and beware lest you become irritated.”

Your service to the ṣhaykh is a tremendous thing. Greater than that however is his service to you.

Wrong feelings against the ṣhaykh endanger confusion in the murīd and the illusion that the nafs is other, and yet there is no other. Ṣhaykh Abu’l-ʿAbbās al-Mursī ﷺ said, “The one who says, ‘why?’ to his ṣhaykh will never be happy.”

Never forget the contract with the ṣhaykh is to move you from *ʿilmi nafsika* to *ʿilmi rabbika* —from knowledge of yourself to knowledge of your Rabb.



The ṣhaykh is the Spiritual Guide. He has gone through 40 or 50 or 60 years of training – and he knows the diseases of the heart and their cures. The company of, and connection to, such a person is essential, because no one can ‘go it alone’— no luminary in ʿIslāmīc history has achieved great heights on his – or her – own.

To all those people who prefer to be on their own, and who prefer to learn on their own I would like to encourage you to run from this. It is a trap from the traps of the ṣhayṭān. Find good company, and keep that good company. *ʿinshāʾa Allāh* (إن شاء الله) this is the way to advancement.

May Allāh Almighty give us good company, and strengthen us together, Amīn! May Allāh Almighty accept our duʿāʾ and deeds and grant us good in this life, and good in the Final World, Amīn! May Allāh bless all the pious people, and make us of them. Amīn!



When the ṣhaykh gathers with his disciples, visitors often remark on their discipline. They all sit cross-legged, with their faces turned down and their hands in their laps and their eyes closed. When the ṣhaykh speaks, there is utter silence from the people gathered, the only sounds coming from the sobs of those who are moved to tears by his words.

His spiritual teaching is generally imparted by means of stories about the great men and women who have trodden the spiritual path in the past. The main emphasis of his teaching is the importance of the dhikr of Allāh, and keeping the company of the other murīdūn. He constantly encourage his students to remain close together. He has often said that keeping the company of the fuqarā is the highest of spiritual exercises, and gives benefit to the murīd that no litany can, even the Supreme Name, if it is performed without keeping their company.



This, the ṣhaykh says, is because maintaining the company of the fuqarā results in consistency in one’s state; whereas being separated from them may cause even those of high states to regress.

The ṣhaykh is deeply concerned with preserving the correct tone of the zawiya. When people gather together for an event, they may fall into idle chat.

The ṣhaykh stresses that the zawiya is a place intended for the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ, and that if the muridūn wish to talk about the affairs of this worldly life (*dunyā*), it is better to go outside to talk, and return when they are finished. You will see the ṣhaykh himself often sits in silence for long periods, speaking only to impart teachings, or to make dhikr of Allāh ﷻ or *tilawah* of al-Qurʿān or pray.



Oh servants of the Lord, Oh believers, you must not overlook this point. Don't be like slaves rowing in the galley of a ship — if you pray, you must pray with love not by force, as if a slavedriver were standing over you with a whip! Allāh never appreciates such forced devotions. Now we are trying to perform all the practices but forgetting to ask for Divine Love, so we are becoming like mechanical robots, or like people performing gymnastics. Allāh ﷻ has asked us to engage our bodies in His worship and in service to His creation through charity and good deeds, but what must be the fruit of those actions? If the fruit is not love it is a bitter fruit and is rejected. If our worship causes Love of Allāh ﷻ to grow in our hearts, then we must keep to that practice and continue on our way; and if we are keeping the company of a spiritual teacher, and find that through keeping his company Love of Allāh ﷻ is awakening in our hearts, then we must follow him closely. The Love of Allāh ﷻ is not easy to attain, for we cannot imagine Him; therefore, He Almighty ﷻ has made the Prophets ﷺ Messengers of His Love and of His Mercy.

The Beloved of Allāh ﷻ, the Seal of Prophets, Muḥammad ﷺ was such a pure medium for the transmission of that love that the hearts of his companions were overwhelmed with his love, and were transported to the Love of Allāh ﷻ. He was the representative of Allāh ﷻ, who is the Absolute Truth; therefore, the Prophet ﷺ declared: “Who has seen me has seen the Absolute Truth”.

When a delegation of non-Muslims came to visit Medina, they were amazed at the love and respect shown to the Prophet ﷺ by his companions. When they returned home they said to their leader: “We have met many emperors, kings and tribal chiefs, but never have we seen one whose subjects or courtiers treated him with such sincere love and devotion. How can this be?”

They were not able to comprehend the secret of this love, as their egos caused them to deny the prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ.

The love of the companions towards the Prophet ﷺ was such that they used to say to him: “I am ready to sacrifice for you even my mother and father”, which, for the Arabs, is much stronger than saying: “I would sacrifice myself for you”. And in reality many of them underwent unbearable hardships for the sake of their belief in the mission of the Prophet ﷺ: exile, disinheritance, boycott, torture and death.

Who represented the Holy Prophet ﷺ after his life in this world? Those who evoked such love. The Prophet ﷺ himself described them: “Those who see them are reminded of Allāh ﷻ,” He who thirsts for Divine Love must seek out such people, but in our time they are mostly hidden, and ʿIslām has come to mean for many people only a set of rules of conduct and forms of worship – an empty shell. Who can derive any flavor or taste from such a thing?



Our shaykh, Sīdī Abu-l Ḥasan ash-Shadhḥulī رحمه الله, said, “My beloved counseled me not to put my feet anywhere except where I hoped for reward of Allāh ﷻ, not to sit anywhere except where I was safe from disobedience to Allāh ﷻ, not to accompany or keep company with anyone except someone in whom I could find support in obedience to Allāh ﷻ, and not to select anyone for myself other than those who increased my certainty.

And how rare they are to find!

He رحمه الله also said. “Whoever directs you to this world has cheated you; whoever directs you to deeds and actions has exhausted you; but whoever directs you to Allāh ﷻ has truly counseled you.”

He also said ﷺ, “Make the consciousness of Allāh ﷻ (*taqwa*) your abode, and the delight of your selfish soul will do you no harm so long as it is discontent with its faults and does not persist in acts of disobedience nor abandons the awareness of Allāh ﷻ in solitude. I say that being content with the self, persisting in disobedient acts, and abandoning awareness of Allāh ﷻ are the foundations of all illnesses, tribulations, and pitfalls.”



The *duʿāʾ* of the Muslim is, “O Allāh ﷻ, keep me in change.” Keep me always changing because everything is changing and every day Allāh ﷻ is on a new creation.

You must be renewing and renewing yourself. You have to always be in change. You must remember that the company of the *shaykh* and that of the *fuqarā* is the highest company.

You must keep each other company. You must travel to other places where there are *fuqarā*. You must sit with the *fuqarā* in every place. You must be an example to them and take example from them when you meet people of quality. Seek the people of knowledge, seek the people of love of Allāh ﷻ and the people of love of Rasūl ﷺ. To take the *ʿadab* of the great ones you have to sit with them, you have to sit with the people of knowledge. It is by their company that you are purified.

Tasawwuf is keeping company, then tasawwuf is listening, then tasawwuf is acting upon what you hear. There is only one enemy and that is your self. The *nafs* have very little good in them. The worst of all things to the Sufis is the recognition of their own good qualities over and against that of other people — it is what sets them back and smashes them on the rocks of destiny. You must not look at your good qualities. You must consider them something that in themselves have been spoiled even by your being conscious of them. You do not look at your self.

You do not find fault with others, you find fault with your self. You must look at your self (*nafs*) every day and every night and say, “What is wrong with it?”

Harith al-Muḥasibī رحمه الله went over his day, then went over his hours and then went over his minutes, then went over his breaths until he had verified that it was pleasing to Allāh ﷻ, that it was acceptable to Allāh ﷻ.

Two great ʿulama met in Baghdad and they argued and fought with each other. At the end one of them said, “Let us meet tomorrow and discuss this matter further.” and the other one said, “No, let us meet tomorrow and make peace and forget all about it.”

This is the way of the Sufis — to begin again.

You must not be limited in your forgiveness of the faults of others but you must not have any measurement of any attention to yourself. Any consciousness of your self you must turn from. You must turn away from the nafs and the method of turning away from the nafs is not a psychological method, but it is dhikrullāh.

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ۗ
أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

alladhīna ʿāmanū wa taṭmaʿinnu qulūbuhum bi-dhikri-llāh
ʿallā bi-dhikri-llāhi taṭmaʿinnu-l-qulūbā

Those who believe and make tranquil their hearts
by the dhikr of Allāh

Truly only in the dhikr of Allāh do hearts find rest
(Sūratu-Raʿd 13:28)

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ

alladhīna yadhkurūna-llāha qiyāmañ
wa quʿūdañw-wa ʿalā junūbihim

Those who remember Allāh standing
and sitting and reclining on their sides.

(Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:191)

So remember Allāh ﷻ standing, sitting and reclining on your side.

You must call upon Allāh ﷻ. You cannot afford to be out of the company of the people who love Allāh ﷻ for any amount of time in this age that we live in. You must be with the people who love Allāh ﷻ, you need them. You need the people of Allāh ﷻ because they will remind you of Allāh ﷻ. You need the people of knowledge because you have to be strong in your dīn and you have to be correct in your dīn in an age where every masjid has a different way of going into sajdah, let alone the higher and deeper dimensions of the dīn.

You must speak well of people and have a good opinion of people. You must be people of chivalry (*futuwwah*/فتوة), who emphasize honesty, peacefulness, gentleness, generosity in poverty, avoidance of complaints and hospitality in life. You must become one of the people who are spoken of because of their high aspiration, their high *himmah* (همة). Your *himmah* must be on a universal scale so that when you go to the Ka'bah, with all the multitudes that are there, you look for the people of Allāh ﷻ and sit with them. Beware of the worldly people (*dunyā*/دُنْيَا). Beware of the people of *dunyā* (دُنْيَا) until you are safe, and when you are safe it does not matter where you go. If you are not safe then you must be careful. You must have G-d consciousness (*taqwā*/تَقْوَى) and you must exercise extreme scrupulousness (*wara'*/ورع). You must take care, take care, watch, until you are on Ṣirāṭu-l-Mustaḳīm because when things go wrong you have to remember that all you have to do is to turn to Allāh ﷻ.

Whoever sits with the perfumer becomes fragrant with his perfume.



Allāh ﷻ says, “Be with Righteous People”, it is an order.

Shaykh Muḥyiddīn Ibn ʿArabi ؒ discusses this in his *Futuḥat al-Makkiyah*, saying,

“When you keep company, you must do so with those whose company will benefit you in your religion (*dīnukum*), by knowledge which you witness in him, actions which he does, or the good character which he possesses.”

When a person sits with someone whose company reminds him of the Final World, he must obtain some of it according to the success Allāh ﷻ gives him in that.

When the one he sits with has this transference, Allāh ﷻ accepts the companion by the remembrance of Allāh ﷻ. The remembrance contained in the Qurʾān is the greatest remembrance. So...

اَتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ
إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ
وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ

ʾutlu mā ʾuḥiya ʾilayka mina-l-kitābi wa ʾaqimi-ṣ-ṣalah
ʾinna-ṣ-ṣalāṭa tanhā ʿani-l-faḥṣhāʾi wa-l-muṅkar
wa la-dḥikru-llāhi ʾakbar : wa-llāhu yaʿlamu mā taṣnaʿūn

Recite what has been Revealed to you from the Book
and establish ṣalāh.

Surely the ṣalah preserves one from filth and evil
and the Remembrance of Allāh is the Greatest.

And Allāh knows what you do.

(Sūratu-l-Aṅkabūt 29:45)

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ

wa ʾanzalnā ʾilayka-dḥ-dḥikra

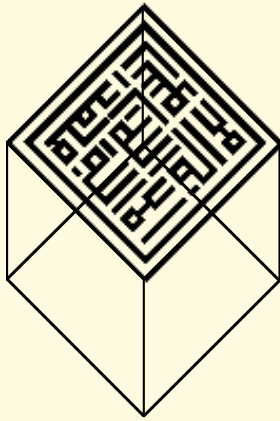
“[It is] We Who sent down the remembrance (*dḥikr*) to you,”

(Sūratu-n-Naḥl 16:45)

The ṣhaykh ﷺ said, “The people of the Qurʾān are the people of Allāh ﷻ and His elite. This elite are the friends (*ʿawliyā*) who sit in the company of the King.”

wa-llāhu ʿalim

ن



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green mountain

virginia

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